THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT WORKSHOP FOR THE THIRD AGE

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Science in Counseling,
Marriage and Family Therapy

by
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Dedication

This graduate project is dedicated to Barb Masters, the love of my life. Barb helped me make the difficult decision to begin a dramatically new career, even though I’m deep into middle age. With her support and encouragement, I have made it through graduate school, and am ready to take next step. Her presence has made the entire adventure possible; more importantly, it has made it more meaningful.
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Abstract

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This project describes a workshop on the Third Age life stage, defined as the period that fits between middle age and old age; roughly 45-64 years old. The life stage, which roughly coincides with Erikson’s “Care” stage, is characterized by a search for generativity – a desire to leave legacy. There are several key transitions that are common to this life stage, including the semi-mythical “midlife crisis,” the empty nest, and instability in relationship and career. The drive for generativity is both a driver of and result of these transitions. The need for generativity, in turn, is related to increased salience of existential issues during this life stage.

The workshop illuminates these challenges for the participants, offering insight into their experiences and the comfort of normalization of those experiences. The workshop takes an integrated therapeutic approach, drawing from Existential and humanist schools of thought, as well as post-modern narrative approaches, family systems and tools from Gottman’s approach to couples therapy.
Introduction

In 2011, the bestselling book *The Big Shift: Navigating The New Stage Beyond Midlife*, argued that our culture’s traditional division of life into childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle age, and old age is outdated and inadequate for today’s realities. Author Marc Freedman posited the need for a new age division between middle age and old age, which he dubbed Third Age. This population is not just the “young old,” he argued; this age group has unique needs that require unique solutions. Freedman contended that, just as our society has constructed support systems for the unique needs of the other age divisions – primary and secondary schools to begin prepare people at the beginning of their lives, Medicare and Social Security to protect them at the end of their lives – we need similar support systems for the Third Age population (Freedman, 2011).

Freedman’s book is particularly focused on supporting the unique career needs of the Third Age population, including a rising interest in radical mid-life career changes into more meaningful work. Mary Catherine Bateson, in her 2010 book *Composing a Further Life*, takes a more comprehensive view of life in this stage (which she labels the “Age of Active Wisdom”), focusing less of the economic and career aspects of the age and addressing how beliefs, values, expectations, and relationships change. Taken together, these two provide a broad overview to a time of life that roughly coincides with Erikson’s “Care” stage (the seventh, “generativity vs. stagnation”).

This population* is going through a series of great transitions: this is the era when children are launched into the world, when retirement preparations are being made, when people begin to take the measure of their lives and consider dreams accomplished, dreams deferred, and

* For the purposes of this project, the population will include males and females aged roughly 45-64, 26.4% of the U.S. population (Howden & Meyer, 2011).
dreams still to be. They begin to evaluate how far they’ve come, what they have contributed, and what their legacy will be.

Statement of Need

The mental health community can play a key role: there is little formalized support for this age group. For instance, there are no therapy or support groups specifically focused on the issues facing this age group in Psychology Today’s online list of 164 groups in Los Angeles (groups.psychologytoday.com). Similarly, among the more than 1,400 groups listed in the Los Angeles Outpatient Group Therapy Directory (www.thegrouplist.org, 2013), there are approximately 20 groups devoted to people aged 45 or more, and a mere handful that offer general (mixed-gender, multi-topic) support rather than being gender- or topic-specific.

The currently unaddressed concerns facing this population segment include:

• Changes to domestic life: Most dramatically, this is the time when many households experience the “empty nest,” when children have grown up and moved out, leaving the parents with the need (or opportunity, depending on their mindset) to restructure their home life around something other than child rearing. Even for those households who do not experience empty nest – e.g., families from collectivist cultures, in which some children are expected to stay in the household – it is a time of changing relationships between parents and children, with a corresponding re-structuring of family systems.

• Career changes: This period of life is often described as a person’s “peak earning years,” but people in this stage also face the possibility that their career has plateaued, with no realistic opportunities for growth, and even the threat of unrecoverable job loss. And should they lose their jobs, they may find they are suddenly, and for the first time, competing with people who are much younger and more freshly trained than they are. In
short, for many people, the old idea of gliding through the latter stages of one’s career on the way to retirement no longer applies. In fact, retirement itself has become a challenge for many people. Rather than planning to spend the rest of their days lounging on the beach, many are forced to plan for non-retirement, for surviving into old age without retiring.

• Relationship changes: Maintaining long-term relationships is always difficult; for this population, threats to the relationship include the redefinition of roles following the departure of children or career changes, as well as dealing with the physical changes that accompany middle age. For instance, how do the changes in sexual drive often evident in this population affect relationships? The partnership between the spouses will likely experience increased and new stresses as each member adapts to their new circumstances.

• Mental health: Aside from the pressures created by the changes already catalogued, this population must deal with the cognitive effects of aging, which are only beginning to appear in this group but will become more apparent as their lives proceed. This may manifest in increasing struggles with depression or anxiety or adjustments to functional issues resulting from diminishing cognitive abilities (memory, for instance). Particularly for this group, the need to understand the meaning of life becomes more salient as members struggle with the legacy they want to leave and other features of the generativity vs. stagnation tug-of-war. Finally, this is the beginning of the time when members of this population wrestle with end of life issues, starting with their own parents and eventually moving to their own lives.
Purpose of Graduate Project

This project will create a workshop for men and women age 45-64, describing the particular challenges (and some potential solutions to those challenges) they face as members of the Third Age. This age range approximately coincides with the seventh of Erikson’s Eight Ages of Man, a stage in which people struggle to live a life of generativity (change in parenting role, focus on community, leaving a legacy, etc.) in the face of possible stagnation. Erikson’s characterization seems particularly apposite for this age group. His theories will provide one lens for understanding the needs of this population. In addition, the centrality of making meaning to this population suggests that Existentialist ideas and techniques will be relevant. The Rogerian notion of congruence – aligning conscious thinking and action with unconscious desires and aspirations – should be illuminating, as will Maslow’s concept of self-actualization as the members of the population move from a self-centered outlook to one that is more other-oriented.

Therapeutic Approaches

Although this project approaches the Third Age from an essentially Eriksonian and existentialist perspective, the workshop curriculum will draw from other therapeutic approaches as needed, including using narrative techniques, assessments and approaches drawn from career counseling theory, and other tools that will help clients from this population understand and adapt to the changing circumstances of their lives.

Workshop structure

The workshop will be a single four hour session, to be presented to clients of appropriate age and interest. It will present an overview of the Third Age, a survey of the transitional challenges faced by individuals in this age group, and specific exercises and tools to help individuals navigate these transitions.
Terminology

- **Active wisdom**: An understanding of the world, characteristic of adulthood II thinking, that focuses on applying earned wisdom to new, future-focused applications.
- **Adulthood II**: An alternative label to Third Age (see below), coined by Bateson (2010).
- **Third Age**: The cohort of the U.S. population aged approximately 45-64. This group is defined mainly by developmental state – it includes male and female, is cross-cultural, and cuts across all SES levels. Although it roughly coincides with Erikson’s “Care” stage of development, it is not equivalent. The importance of the designation is that people in this cohort are no longer young adults, but are not yet “old”: they are something in between, with unique developmental and psychosocial features and needs. (Freedman, 2011)
Literature Review

Introduction

To create an effective workshop, we need first to understand the developmental drivers of the transitions typical of the Third Age. This discussion will explore the theoretical constructions that describe the Age, focusing particularly on the importance of Erikson’s concept of generativity in creating individual’s need for change at this life stage. In addition, it will look at the current socioeconomic forces facing 45-64 year old Americans that have acted to enhance the stress associated with these developmental transitions. It will assess several events that are, in the public mind, associated with this age group, including the concept of a “mid-life crisis” as well as “empty nest syndrome,” to see if they are, in fact, genuine crises or rather simply typical elements reflecting the developmental issues of this life stage. Additionally, the discussion will consider the physical and mental effects of aging – having crossed the mid-point of life, “old age” health issues and eventual death become ever more salient concerns – and how they affect the psychology of the age group.

Once we establish the forces at play during this life stage, the discussion will explore some of the actual transitions typical of this age group, starting with how relationships of Third Age individuals are affected: are their romantic connections strengthened or weakened? How do their roles as parents change when their children reach adulthood?

The other key transition examined will be how the individual’s career – and his or her thinking and feeling about that career – changes. When this life stage begins, people are generally in their “peak earning years”; when it ends, they are assumed to be on the verge of retirement. What happens to the individual as they move through the stage? How does their
thinking shift? How does their understanding of the meaning of work, and the values they attach to their career, change?

Having completed an exploration of the issues at play, the discussion will move to the therapeutic interventions available to be presented in the workshop. What is an effective approach to helping individuals navigate the transitions associated with the Third Age? What insights do we offer, what tools do we present? In other words, what do we do with our understanding of this life stage?

*Middle Age: The New Reality*

In the United States, socioeconomic realities have changed dramatically in recent years, for the population in general and particularly for people in the Third Age. First, the group has grown: according to the 2010 U.S. Census, there are 81.5 million middle aged individuals (ages 45-64) in the U.S.; this number grew 31.5% in the previous decade as the baby boom generation approaches old age. The aging of the population is reflected as well in the rise in the median age, up to 37.2 years from 35.3. In California, 9.3 million people, or 24.9% of the population, is within this age group (Howden & Meyer, 2011). From a therapeutic perspective, there are simply more people in this life stage than ever before.

Along with this growth in numbers has come a corresponding growth in the number of middle age individuals in the work force. The median age of workers in the U.S. has steadily risen since 1980, reaching 41.7 years in 2010. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2020, the median age of workers will have risen to 42.8. This rise is partially due to the general rise in age, but there is another factor: a rise in the percentage of individuals in this age group who participate in the labor force. In 2000, 13.1 percent of the U.S. labor force was over
55 years old; in 2010 it was 19.5 percent, and BLS projects that it will be 25.2 percent in 2020. (Toossi, 2012).

Several factors are contributing to this growth. Partially, it is simply a matter of the population bulge that is the baby boom working its way through the population. But it also reflects longer lifespans, as well as the fact that people are generally healthier later in life than they used to be. This is the underlying driver of the rise of the Third Age as a distinct stage between young adulthood and old age (Freedman, 2011).

Economic factors also come into play. Wages for most individuals have stagnated: median family income dropped 6% between 2000 and 2010 (Mishel, Bivens, Gould & Shierholz, 2012). Worker’s ability to save for retirement has been curtailed, especially since the financial crisis of 2008, which diminished or destroyed many individuals’ retirement savings and investments. Healthcare costs have risen dramatically at the same time worker’s healthcare benefits have been cut. And changes in Social Security eligibility rules have pushed many to put off retirement (Toossi, 2012).

Finally, note that in 2012, a 45-year old in the United States could be expected to live an additional 35.8 years (Arias, 2014). This means that an individual at the beginning of the Third Age still has more “adulthood” to look forward to than he or she has already experienced.

Combine these factors, and you’re looking at more middle aged individuals in the U.S. than ever before, more of those individuals working than ever before, and more insecurity in the age group than at any time in the recent past. More people, and more pressure on them to work later, means more stress. Evidence of that can be seen in suicide rates, which have been climbing for both men and women in this age group since 1988, in contrast to the historical pattern in
which suicide rates for this age group have declined steadily over most of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century (Phillips, Robin, Nugent & Idler, 2010).

\textit{The Third Age or Adulthood II}

In a certain sense, the difference between Freedman’s Third Age and Mary Catherine Bateson’s Adulthood II is the difference between stereotypical male and female concerns: Freedman focuses on career, and Bateson is concerned with relationships (although in neither case is this focus exclusive of the other). In \textit{Composing a Further Life}, Bateson describes the same life-stage as the “age of active wisdom,” a time in which individuals, faced with the same socioeconomic and demographic realities Freedman cites, re-evaluate their lives and their futures. She sees composing a further life as “looking with new eyes at what has been lived so far and making choices that show the whole process in a new light and that offer a sense of completion and fulfillment” (Bateson, 2010). This re-evaluation, she argues, is characterized by several features unique to the life-moment:

- Individuals tend to see the Age of Active Wisdom as a moment of liberation and renewal. This manifests in shedding of old baggage (perhaps literally, by discarding accumulated “stuff” or moving to a new home), rekindling relationships with old friends or strengthening ties with relatives, and similar behaviors.

- There is a tension between the desire for discontinuity (i.e., making a fresh start) and the usefulness of continuity, seen particularly in an emphasis on existing skill(s) and passions that can be transferred to new venues.

- It is common for individuals in this moment to seek to reconnect with old friends who have been lost over time (Bateson, 2010).
Bateson and Freedman present slightly different takes on the same essential idea: individuals in this age group face challenges that are unique to them, not only in today’s society, but also historically: this life-stage, a “bridge” between young adulthood and old age, has never been as long as it is today, and never before have there been so many people living in this stage. Both Freedman and Bateson argue that this is something new that lacks cultural precedent, definition, any institutional support, and even a name! (Freedman, 2011; Bateson, 2010).

**Generativity: Leaving a Legacy**

“Generativity is the central challenge of adulthood, referring directly to reproduction and child care but also to the full range of contributions an individual makes to the community by work and creativity, to the need to nurture what we plant and what we initiate, and to continue caring for what is passed on to us, yet generativity builds on identity and intimacy.” (Bateson, 2010)

The seventh of Erik Erikson’s Eight Ages of Man, the “care” stage, is defined by the crisis of “generativity vs. stagnation.” Erikson defined generativity as “primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson, 1963), essentially the need of adults to contribute to the continuation of their family, society, and even humanity itself. This stage, which roughly coincides with middle age, sees individuals moving away from building their lives, and toward thinking about the time after their lives: it is a time of transition. It is a time, in fact, of redefinition, often featuring the rise of an existential desire to create a future that includes something to believe in, a Rogerian need to bring the self into congruence, and a Maslovian drive for self-actualization (Slater, 2003).

Further, the generativity impulse can be understood to be motivated by a desire to transcend death and create a sort of immortality, or a wish to continue caring for children even after one’s own death, and a desire to fulfill societal expectations to be “responsible parents.” Generativity can be understood to build on certain assumptions: that society is a basic good that needs to be extended, and that a commitment to that idea drives “generative behavior”
(conserving, preserving, nurturing, etc.) that yields meaning by allowing individuals to define themselves by their contribution to, and unity with, the society they are a part of (Ehleman & Ligon, 2012).

The generative impulse also rises as individuals begin to see the truth behind the myths they have been using to sustain themselves: “I am immortal”; “me and my loved ones will never die”; “the life I’m living is the only one I could be living,” and “my life’s only purpose is to care for others” (Becker, 2006).

Another way to think of generativity is to consider the phenomenon in its cultural context. When young, people tend to see culture as an “adversary,” a snare that must be escaped if we are to become fully individual. But as we get older, we begin to understand culture not as a trap, but rather as a base, a place to root our own generative activity. In fact, culture provides the method we use to pursue our generative projects; without culture, it is impossible to move them forward (Berman, 1995).

Culture provides the medium for the expression of generativity, but the need is generated by individuals’ feelings about, and fear of, life and death. That fear leads individuals to “heroic” acts: courageous attempts to individuate, transcend death and gain a kind of immortality. As part of this heroic process, individuals psychologically merges with a transference object (TO) – a specific other, a peer group, social norm, religious creed, etc. – to create a sense of security, fearlessness, and a transcendence of death. The TO becomes the locus of conscience, the measure against which individuals’ behavior is compared, and defines the challenges they struggles against as they engage in generative behavior. Thus, the individual becomes a hero to the community via charity work, or to future generations by advocating for social change, or simply by working to secure a sound financial future for his or her children (Berman, 1995).
Generativity has multiple manifestations. It drives altruistic behavior, including volunteerism. It drives individuals to attempt to transcend their own personal boundaries and limitations through introspection; learning new or expanding existing skills; or strengthening religious beliefs. It can even be seen in individuals’ enhanced respect for their relationships (Ehleman & Ligon, 2012). Additionally, Kotre (1995) notes that generativity has a variety of appearances. He suggests two basic manifestations: agentic, concerned with the self-preservation and expansion of the existence of the individual, and communal, which is about participation in the larger social organization. He also posits a hierarchy of generative behavior, a progression of transference objects that are increasingly more moral, starting with the self and moving up to the cultural level. Kotre argues that those who show generative behavior at this the lower levels tend to eventually expand their generative efforts to the next, higher levels (i.e. move out of their own household into the greater culture around them.) He also cautions that an individual’s generative behavior won’t necessarily be positive, arguing that an individual’s desire for immortality may be served just as well by leaving a destructive legacy as by a positive one (Kotre, 1995).

Generative acts might also be responses to an individual’s suffering associated with an existential “threat to self” (that is, death). This can be seen in that generative acts are not just altruistic, but are also extensions of the self, an attempt to leave a legacy (i.e. to cheat death through a form of immortality). Seen this way, generative acts can be an attempt to reclaim or repair a threatened self, a way of moving forward despite fear and suffering, and of reassuring the self that it is still present and vital (de Medeiros, 2009).

Encouraging participants to construct an “oral history” of their lives is itself a generative act because it shares (and preserves) life experiences (literally a legacy), and it often
“rejuvenates” the participant by integrating their experiences into a coherent whole (Ehleman & Ligon, 2012).

The need for generativity is driven by the rising awareness of one’s own mortality that is characteristic of this life stage. This awareness helps drive the need for generativity, but it also represents a challenge itself. It has been argued that one of the key tasks facing individuals in this life stage is accepting the reality of death, and learning how to make sense of that fact (Waskel, 1995). This is, of course, easier for some than others. In that small 1995 study, Waskel cross-referenced participant’s temperament (as identified by Kiersey’s Temperament Sorter) with their attitudes about death; he found that subjects with five temperament types – Extrovert/Sensing/Thinking/Judging, Extrovert/Sensing/Feeling/Judging, Introvert/Sensing/Feeling/Judging, Introvert/Sensing/Thinking/Judging and Extrovert/Intuitive/Feeling/Perceiving – tend to think more and more anxiously) about death. (The study also found that Extrovert/Intuitive/Feeling/Judging, Introvert/Intuitive/Feeling/Perceiving, and Introvert/Sensing/Thinking/Judging types were more likely to have experienced “midlife crisis.”)

But everyone, regardless of temperament, must eventually come to terms with their fear of death. People tend to follow one of two strategies: denial, or struggle. The difficulty with using denial, of course, is that eventually it becomes impossible to sustain. Confronting the reality – struggling – does not mean eliminating fear. It means having the courage to continue, despite the fear (Slater, 2003).

Finding that courage requires an existential journey, the ability to identify (or make) meaning. As Slater states: “I am what meaning I can make of my life” (Slater, 2003). This struggle to create meaning in this life stage involves dealing with two competing ideas: that we
are what we are, immutable at the core (*sosein*), and therefore cannot change, versus the idea that we can change any way we want, into anything we want, if we merely have the will and discipline to do so. Reconciling these two opposing ideas involves “active self acceptance,” a process of self-transformation that involves building self-knowledge and acceptance of the fact that, while we are what we are, we also can write our own stories, shaping the narrative to accommodate our own strengths and weaknesses (Strenger, 2009). This is not an easy process, but it can be accomplished.

“Midlife Crisis” or Predictable Stage?

Popular culture posits a “midlife crisis” that generally occurs at the beginning of this life stage, and manifests as a break from an individual’s established life patterns. The break is usually perceived as a regression: the individual suddenly begins behaving in ways that are more appropriate for a younger person (stereotypically, a middle-aged man leaves his family, takes up with a much younger woman, and starts driving a red sports car; for women, the stereotype often includes extensive cosmetic surgery). These are symptoms of a crisis, a problematic transition in reaction to the existential fears that aging brings into focus. Defined clinically (using a post-modern/narrative framework), a midlife crisis generally has three characteristics:

1. The adaptations that worked for an individual through his or her young adulthood are no longer adequate.
2. The individual’s perspective on time changes from a focus on counting up from birth (how much time I’ve accumulated) to a focus on counting down to death (how much time I have left).
3. The individual reinterprets his or her future self, with a focus on planning the second half of his or her life.
Whether these revisions to a personal narrative are part of a full-blown crisis or not, the individual clearly is going through a transition. It can be a period in which the individual reorganizes personal meanings without signs of distress – a transition – or it can include a disorganization of the individual’s meaning system as a result of intense changes in his or her self, i.e. a crisis (Hermans & Oles, 1999).

Oddly, in the case of an actual midlife crisis, our culture sees the resulting psychological distress as both commonplace and yet somehow more extreme than experienced at other moments of transition, although studies suggest neither of those assumptions are true, with one study showing only 26% of those over 40 reporting having experienced a crisis. (Wethington, 2000; Lachman, 2004).

Although the midlife crisis, and its associated risible behavior, may be more myth than reality, Erikson and many who followed him argue that individuals in this stage of life do face a crisis. For Erikson, it is the “Care” stage in which individuals must struggle to achieve generativity in the face of stagnation. A more externalized analysis might locate the crisis in the realities of living in the U.S. in the 21st Century: aging in a culture that puts an enormous premium on looking (and being) youthful, and facing the prospect of an extended lifespan without the financial security to match (Freedman, 2011). Either way, middle age is a stage of life like any other, with its own set of challenges that must be confronted.

An alternate way to think of the family life cycle is to posit a series of typical phases, defined by common events, rather than typical ages: for example, “no-children,” “preschool,” “launching,” and “postparental.” (Harris, Ellicott & Holmes, 1986) Two of these phases typically occur during this age group: the “launching” stage (preparing adolescents/young adults for adulthood) and the “postparental” stage, after all children have left the household. Like Erikson’s
stages, these potentially mark moments of important psychosocial transition. The Harris, Ellicott and Holmes 1986 study found that for women, the major life transitions are in fact more correlated to these life cycle phases than to biological age; for many women, the launching phase was often associated with marital or working-life transitions. However, the study also showed that the move from one phase to another does not automatically precipitate disruptive transitions, and that those transitions which do occur are often perceived as positive by the women experiencing them. Disruptive transitions, it found, were more commonly related to unexpected events (a sudden death, perhaps) or predictable events that were unexpectedly stressful. The study, limited though it was to middle-class women, also suggests an important point to remember when considering all life transitions: they are not necessarily negative experiences!

This latter point may be key to creating a therapeutic framework for Third Age individuals concerned about midlife crisis (or any transition): the effect of the transition on their lives is determined by their understanding of the transition, and whether they interpret the experience positively or negatively. Thus, a narrative approach to working with individuals (especially men) who are experiencing a midlife crisis can be particularly effective by helping clients see their lives as a story of change, from youth through old age, and seeing themselves as the active subject of that story. Clients can then understand the meaning of their own past, present, and future. Using this approach, the therapist can focus not just on individuals’ thoughts about their future, but also on the affective meaning of that future, and especially on expressing and understanding their feelings, about that future, in context of the crisis (Hermans & Oles, 1999).
Another transition that is popularly assumed to be common, and difficult, during this life stage is the so-called “empty nest syndrome.” The common wisdom is that, upon departure of the last child, parents experience grief, loneliness, and a loss of purpose, potentially leading to depression or anxiety.

The common wisdom is not quite correct, however. Empty Nest Syndrome (ENS) is not, in fact, a clinical condition. There is no specific diagnosis for ENS in DSM-5; the words “empty nest” only appear as an example of diagnosis V62.89 Phase of Life Problem (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The truth is most people do not experience ENS. Those individuals who are not parents obviously do not experience it. But even among those who are parents, only a minority experience this transition as a “syndrome.” Cultural and socio-demographic factors influence whether the term “empty nest” applies at all. For some cultures that center on extended rather than nuclear families, for instance, there may never be an empty nest. In addition, those factors, plus relational processes among the individuals involved (parents and children) influence the effect of empty nest. Cultural assumptions about departing children vary greatly. Western cultures tend to view children leaving as a sign of successful parenting: the children have been adequately prepared for adulthood. Non-Western cultures, on the other hand, tend to perceive the break up of the family as a sign that the parents have failed to instill the proper family-oriented values in their children (Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009). Similarly, one study found that there is no difference in well-being between women whose children have left home and those whose children remain at home (Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan & Coleman, 1989). In short, not everyone experiences empty nest, and for many of those who do, it is a normative process, just
another transition commonly experienced by individuals in this life stage. It isn’t automatically a traumatic experience, but rather a transition that is negative for some – especially those who see it as creating a loss of meaning – but for many it is an opportunity to growth and positive change (Raup & Myers, 1989). There is data that challenges the common wisdom that, for women particularly, the empty nest is a source of depression; the role changes that accompany the departure of children are not necessarily experienced negatively (Harris, Ellicott & Holmes, 1986). Similarly the common assumption that empty nest leads to marital instability is not supported by studies. There is some indication that the risk of marital disruption rises as the last children’s departure approaches, and is greatest in late marriages (that is, the longer the couple has been married before the children depart, the less likely it is that disruption will occur; Hiedemann, Suhomlinova & O’Rand, 1998). But one recent study showed that the empty nest is a place of increased marital satisfaction (Gorchoff, John & Helson, 2008); another suggests that both marital and life satisfaction can improve after children’s departure, especially when the parents maintain regular contact with the children (Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009).

However, individual experience of empty nest depends on many variables. Gender can make a difference: one study argues that, for men particularly, the effect of empty nest is tied to (and overshadowed by) a coincidental transition from a youthful need to compete and achieve toward an old age mindset, focused on comfort, legacy, and an awareness of mortality (Scher, 1992). Similarly, there is some evidence that, for women, their likelihood of a negative empty nest experience is mitigated when they are employed outside of the home (Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan & Coleman, 1989). To complicate things further, however, the same study revealed that women in this life stage who were employed outside the home overall experienced
less anxiety and better health than those who were exclusively homemakers, regardless of the status of their nest.

Mitchell and Lovegreen (2009) note several recurring themes typical for empty nesters:

1. Social and cultural attachments matter:
   - many of these parents experience a traumatic severing of their old relationships with the departed children (requiring construction of a new one).
   - Parents frequently report missing the day-to-day interactions with their children
   - Mothers often experience a sense that they have lost their role in the family; fathers remark on a feeling of having lost control of their children
   - Families with fewer children, especially those that lack other social support, tend to struggle more with the transition

2. Expectations and timing are important
   - When children leave “off time” (earlier or later than expected, or as compared to “typical” timing), the transition becomes more difficult
   - Older parents have an easier time making the adjustment than younger parents
   - The transition is easier when it takes longer (i.e. when children return home for a time)
   - Individuals who are actively engaged in other roles beside parenting (including but not limited to employment status) tend to have an easier transition

3. Anxiety about the “real world” has an influence
   - Parents often report anxiety and worry about their children’s health, safety, and ability to succeed and maintain independence
   - The parents’ perceptions, rather than “reality,” drives the level of anxiety
The authors note that these themes influence the parents’ experience during the empty nest period. Significantly, however, they conclude that only a minority of parents – fathers and mothers equally – have a strong negative experience; for most, it is in fact a positive experience, leading to increased personal growth and an improved relationship with the spouse (Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009).

We should note that the emotions and cognitions that underlie the roles played by women (and, for that matter, men) do not simply vanish once the last child leaves home. They continue, and must be adapted (and adapted to) as parents’ experience role loss and a need to establish a new relationship with the children. For mothers, particularly, this can be difficult, as they carry the brunt of strong social norms and expectations that suggest they are solely responsible for their child’s development, despite the many other influences involved, including that of the father! (Oliver, 1988) Oliver also notes that the key to the transition isn’t that women want to continue the role, it is that they may have difficulty establishing a new role that satisfies their needs as well as those of social norms. The resultant distress, she emphasizes, is not evidence of pathology, but rather the expected outcome of a normal, if stressful, life transition.

Oliver proposes using Rational-Emotive Therapy to ameliorate distress associated with empty nest, particularly that which derives from changing roles for the mother and the children. In her approach, the therapist helps clients identify the irrational beliefs they hold about the transition, challenge their own “shoulds,” and replace both with rational thinking, hopes, and desires. This requires abandoning absolutist demands and perfectionist standards about the relationships, and replacing them with rational desires and unconditional self-acceptance. Cognitive restructuring and assertiveness training are two tools that can help accomplish these goals (Oliver, 1988).
Relationships: Is He/She Still the One?

The good news for Third Age couples is that marriage† satisfaction tends to follow a simple pattern: it is highest in the immediate afterglow of the initial commitment, falls steadily through child-bearing and child-rearing, then increases when the children become young adults – that is, when the empty nest arrives (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova & O’Rand, 1998). For women specifically, the transition to empty nest generally increases marital satisfaction (though not necessarily life satisfaction) by allowing them to better enjoy the time spent with their partners. Note that this does not mean they spend more time with their partners, just that the time spent is more satisfying (Gorchoff, John & Helson, 2008).

The challenge, of course, is that the period immediately around empty nest is a time of great risk for the relationship. One study suggests that the risk of “marriage disruption” (i.e. separation or divorce) rises as a couple approaches and then experiences empty nest. The marriage is at greatest risk after last child leaves, and the earlier empty nest occurs, the higher the risk of disruption. In other words, the longer the couple has been married, the less risk posed by the empty nest (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova & O’Rand, 1998).

A family systems approach to understanding this life period seems appropriate. The departure of the now-adult children causes a disruption to the established system, forcing a potentially traumatic re-configuration (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova & O’Rand, 1998).

Career: Continue, Change, Complete?

Many individuals in the Third Age find themselves making serious career changes. Sometimes this is voluntary, often a result of the shifting circumstances, attitudes, and values that

† For the purposes of this discussion, “marriage” refers to any long-term, committed, cohabitating relationship, regardless of legal status.
characterize the life stage. For others, the changes are involuntary: especially since the Great Recession (2008), many Third Age individuals have found their jobs changing or disappearing.

One recent development is that older individuals (including Third Agers) are returning to school in unprecedented numbers. Sometimes this is involuntary, thanks to economic uncertainty and its connected career uncertainty. Other times, the return is voluntary, reflecting the pursuit of voluntary mid-life career change (made possible in part by longer working-life spans). Recent disruptions to the traditional career model (the shift of seniority, which was once seen as a guarantor of security and now often seems to mark the individual as an expensive liability, is especially relevant to the Third Age) have made life-long learning a necessity, rather than a luxury. Although a return to school is often perceived as “the only option,” it is also associated with a perception of mastery; it is not clear whether that perception is derived from attending school or makes the return possible (Hostetler, Sweet & Moen, 2006).

Career shifts demand new skills; more than that, perhaps, successfully navigating them requires resilience, self-respect, an ability to rebound from loss, and more (Engels, 1995). For instance, one study showed that individuals whose personalities lean toward “proactive” do a better job in managing their careers (Byrne, Dik & Chiaburu, 2008). These are all opportunities for therapeutic intervention.

Whether individuals are facing voluntary or involuntary career change (or, in fact, is simply approaching retirement with its concomitant role shifts), they face a central challenge of meaning: “If I am what I do, what happens when what I do changes? Or when I no longer ‘do’ anything?” (Slater, 2003)

The sense of disruption is not uniform, of course. For White men, for instance, the recent disruptions feel unprecedented, and may be perceived as an attack on their own (invisible to
them) privilege. To them, the upheaval feels related to the influx of women and people of color into the workplace, interfering with what they see as their entitlement to a particular career path that includes stability, promotion, and eventual retirement (Kormanik, 2005). But women (of all ethnicities, it should be noted) have always been more likely than men to experience career disruptions. The most obvious common disruption is usually in young adulthood when cultural norms force women to carry the lions share of the burden of parenting, but this disruption echoes throughout women’s careers, manifesting in lower pay, fewer promotions, and less security (Hostetler, Sweet & Moen, 2006). This, of course, has implications for therapeutic intervention: White men are more likely to place the locus of control outside of themselves, blaming the “other,” or an unfair system, requiring more focus on introducing a sense of control over their own careers (Kormanik, 2005).

Extensive career counseling is beyond the scope of this project; however, the workshop will offer participants some tools they can use to begin grappling with the career disruption they may be experiencing. Narrative career counseling – asking the participants to cast their own career history (and future) as a story that they are both the central character in and author of – can help participants make sense of their career so far, their feelings about what they’ve done, and what they want to do next (Sharf, 2006)

Comments on Literature Review

My inspiration for this project was personal, as I have experienced many of the transitions described here: empty nest, relationship instability, career changes, and a rising desire to incorporate generativity into my life. My second (and youngest) child left for college less than a year ago, leaving me and my significant other alone in the house; fortunately, there has been no empty nest syndrome. I was divorced at age 45, and met my significant other a year later; we
remain in a committed relationship eight years later. And during this same time period, I have acted on my long-standing dissatisfaction with my career and began the journey that has brought me almost to completion of an MS in Counseling. That journey included my own drive for generativity, and has featured the economic disruptions (I was laid off nearly two year ago) that have become increasingly common among this life stage.

While I was experiencing these transitions, I noticed that many of my friends were experiencing them, too: they have had relationship issues, career disruption (both voluntary and imposed upon them), and the departure of their children. We talked often of the impact of the empty nest, and our desire for more meaning in our work and lives as the idea of leaving a legacy became more salient. But it wasn’t until I encountered the books by Freedman and Bateson – and Erikson’s conceptual framework of life stages as a series of crises – that I began to see all of this as something more than just coincidence. The revelation that my experiences were, in fact, predictable for my age was followed quickly by a second revelation: There is little formal support for the Third Age. This project, then, is personal: I have experienced a crisis (in the Eriksonian sense) for which there is little support available. I conceived this project as a way to begin to offer that support.

To be fair, it’s only very recently that the Third Age has even been named. Freedman’s book, in which he defined the life stage, was published at roughly the same time I began my work here at CSUN. But with the exception of the books by Freedman and Bateson, I have found very little that treated this life stage as a discrete entity; much of the material reviewed here focuses on “middle age” or “old age,” and had to be adapted for the purposes of this project.

Regardless, the literature did reveal a great deal about this life stage. As I waded through the data I was most struck by the many myths and misconceptions we have about this life stage:
most men go through a ridiculous mid-life crisis, women are devastated by their children leaving home, relationships fall apart during this time, and – most importantly – this is a time of stasis, when little happens and people are just coasting into retirement and old age. Although each of these myth is sometimes true, none is always true, or even true most of the time.

My first thinking about this project came after reading The Big Shift, which focuses on the shifting attitudes about career that characterize the Third Age. Through my research, I quickly came to understand that a career crisis is only one of several transitions (as I’ve outlined here) common to this life stage. I also came to see that all those transitions could best be understood as fitting under the umbrella of Erikson’s Care stage, which became my framework for understanding the life stage and for building this project. I came to understand that for this life stage, career issues, like relationship issues, were really generativity issues: people trying to make sense of their lives as they shift from building a life to evaluating that life. Existential questions hang over everything here as people work to make meaning in their lives.

As the existential core of this project became clear, and I looked for the appropriate therapeutic tools to offer, I noticed that narrative approaches kept appearing in the literature. This made sense to me, as my personal experience of this life stage has been one of stories – both telling my own, and hearing others’. Thus, narrative exercises became the dominant tool used here.
Project Audience and Implementation Factors

Introduction

As previously outlined, demographic changes and economic conditions have given birth to the idea (in popular culture, if not yet in the scientific literature) of a new life stage, aged 45-64. This stage, which fits between “middle age” and “old age” and roughly coincides with Erikson’s “Care” (generativity vs. stagnation) stage. Identified in the popular press as either the Third Age or the Age of Active Wisdom, this age is a response to a new situation: Americans are living longer, and working longer, than ever before, and the culture (both in conception and in economic and legal structures) has not yet adapted to this new reality. This large and growing segment of the population is barely recognized as distinct from younger adults or seniors, yet individuals within the segment face unique challenges. This project is concerned with the lack of therapeutic support specifically for this segment, and proposes to be a modest step toward providing that support by creating a one-day workshop for individuals within the segment. The workshop will present:

- An overview defining the psychosocial characteristics of the segment, normalizing the challenges being faced.
- A brief explanation of the forces (developmental, social, economic, demographic) at play within the segment, including how those forces shape the emotional and cognitive experiences of those living in this life stage.
- Opportunities for the participants to personalize the workshop by identifying their own experience of living in this life stage.
- An introduction to tools and techniques the participants can use to help them makes sense of their lives within the life stage, and to help them cope with, and
move through, the obstacles they face as they meet the Eriksonian challenge to build a generative life.

Development of Project

The genesis of this project is in the author’s personal experience. As a current member of the Third Age, I have personally faced several of the challenges outlined: career change (both voluntary and involuntary); relationship upheaval (divorce and a new relationship); empty nest; and an increasing desire for – and pursuit of – generativity in my life. I have also watched as many of my friends also grappled with these challenges, with varying levels of pain and success: it took little convincing for me to see this as a genuine life stage, and to see the dearth of (therapeutic) support available.

While in the middle of this (at the time undefined and unnamed) disruption, I chanced upon Freedman’s *The Big Shift: Navigating The New Stage Beyond Midlife*. Reading this book, at the same time I was beginning my Master’s work, was like flipping on a flashlight in the middle of a dark cave: suddenly, all the shadows fell away, and instead of constantly bumping my head on unseen stalactites, I was able to see the vastness of the cavern, in all its complex, fearsome glory. I was able to see that I wasn’t just experiencing random, unforeseen challenges, but that those challenges – and my emotional and cognitive responses to them – were entirely predictable and commonplace. Further, as my studies continued, I began to understand that I needn’t face those challenges alone and unsupported; many of the tools I was learning, the theories and approaches and therapeutic techniques, would offer powerful help to me and those like me. That realization, along with a parallel revelation that the therapeutic community is only beginning to recognize that this is a distinct population whose mental health needs demand a specific, comprehensive approach, let me to begin building this project.
Intended Audience

The audience for this workshop will be individuals, age 45-64, who are looking for help in coping with the challenges they are facing as members of the Third Age. There are no demographic restrictions other than age, and even that qualification is somewhat porous, as friends and family of Third Agers who are interested in understanding or helping might also be interested. Note also that the workshop favors no particular gender, ethnicity or SES, and will address their differing experiences.

The participants will be drawn, in part, from the population that is already pursuing therapy; participants will be recruited at community clinics and local counseling practices (via referral, for instance). In addition, the audience can be drawn from the population that is not currently in counseling, but might benefit; these participants could be recruited anywhere members of the cohort might gather, including perhaps local civic organizations.

Personal Qualifications

The workshop can be delivered by anyone – trainee, intern, or licensed therapist – who understands therapeutic principles, theory, and approaches. The presenter (or presenters – the workshop could easily be adapted for delivery by partnering presenters, and might in fact benefit from having multiple professionals available to provide more one-on-one interaction when appropriate) should have an understanding of the Eriksonian model of psychosocial development (as well as the subsequent work that built on his thinking). In addition, the presenter should be familiar with Existentialist ideas about creating meaning in ones’ life, with postmodernist/narrative approaches, and about family systems thinking about relationships.
Environment/Equipment

Although there is no theoretical limit to the number of participants in any given presentation of this workshop, it seems reasonable to set a manageable maximum number, perhaps 10-12 people. (For larger groups, co-presenters would probably be preferred.) The room housing the workshop, therefore, needs to be large enough to accommodate a dozen people, plus the presenter(s). The room should be comfortable and private, a safe haven where the participants will feel comfortable revealing their own thoughts and feelings. The only equipment necessary will be a computer and projector for the presentation (PowerPoint) itself.

Project Outline

1. The Third Age: Who Are We?
   a. Definition
      i. Ages
      ii. Life stage (“Care”)
   b. Demographics
      i. Age boundaries of segment
      ii. Size of segment
         1. Current
         2. Pattern of growth
   c. Socioeconomic situation
      i. Employment
         1. Stability vs. change
         2. Potential and actual joblessness
         3. Opportunity for retirement
ii. Families

1. Marriage and divorce statistics
2. Empty nest
3. Other features and characteristics

2. Shared Challenges

a. Generativity:

   i. What is the meaning of life?

   ii. What is my legacy?

   iii. Oral History Exercise

      1. What does generativity look like in your life?
      2. Taking stock

   iv. Existential Realizations: I’m going to die (someday)!

      1. How do I make sense of my life and death?
      2. Exercise: Narrative approach

b. Career

   i. I am what I do

   ii. Challenges:

      1. I don’t want to retire
      2. My job is no longer secure
      3. Looking for meaning

   iii. Goal if change careers?

      1. Legacy
      2. Fulfillment
3. Community service

iv. Tools

1. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (or Kiersey)
2. Super Career Theory
3. Narrative Approach: The story of your career

c. Empty Nest

i. What happens when the kids leave?

ii. Is there such a thing as “empty nest syndrome”? 

iii. How will I experience it?

1. Effect on my cognition/affect
2. Effect on my relationships with spouse and kids

iv. Exercises

1. Family Systems Theory: Genogram
2. From Gottman’s Seven Principles ...

3. Wrap up/conclusion
Conclusion

Summary

This purpose of this project is to design a workshop (for clients) on the Third Age life stage: what it is, what it means, how it will affect you, and what you can do about it. The project defines the Third Age as the previously un-named (and ill-defined) period that begins at the tail-end of middle age and precedes old age; roughly 45-64 years old. This life stage roughly coincides with Erikson’s “Care” stage (the seventh), and, like Erikson’s stage, is dominated by the rise of interest in generativity: members of this age group shift from a previous concern over their own futures to a concern over the future of their children, communities, and societies. This concern reflects the transitions that beset the age group, and at the same time drives them. This life stage is “new” in that it is only recently – with lengthening life spans, longer working lives, and late-life economic insecurity increasingly replacing stability – affecting a significant portion of the population. It is far more common today to see people switching careers late in life, and putting off retirement, than just a generation ago. There are several key transitions that are common to this life stage. There is the semi-mythical appearance of the “midlife crisis,” which is far more rare than depicted in popular culture, and far more complex in its implications than has been assumed. Another transition is the empty nest, which contrary to the popular impression does not affect everyone, nor is it overwhelmingly perceived as a crisis worthy of the “empty nest syndrome”: for most, the results of the transition are ultimately positive. Similarly, the period is often marked by relationship difficulties which, if successfully negotiated, often leave a partnership stronger than previous. And the drive for generativity is both a driver of and result of two other challenges that commonly confront people in this life stage. Members of this life stage often encounter career instability, both voluntary and involuntary. This is a time when people
find they have found the limits of their careers – no more promotions, increasing job insecurity – and an increasing need for work that is “meaningful.” Returning to school at an advanced age is becoming more commonplace, and the old model of sticking with a single career through to retirement (or retiring at all) is increasingly anachronistic.

Finally, this is the time of life when people begin to seriously grapple with existential issues. As their bodies age, their health becomes more of a concern; they in turn begin considering their own deaths, and what that means. This is one of the keys to the rise of the generative impulse: as people become aware that they have largely competed the process of growing and building a life, they begin to think about preserving a legacy.

The workshop that results from this project will illuminate all of these challenges for the participants, offering insight into what they’re experiencing, the comfort of knowing they aren’t the only ones who are experiencing these challenges, and tools and techniques for successfully navigating these rough seas to calmer shores. An integrated therapeutic approach is used, drawing from Existential and humanist schools of thought, as well as post-modern narrative approaches, family systems and tools from Gottman’s approach to couples therapy.

Discussion

My conception of this project has evolved as my work proceeded. I originally planned it as an eight-week group, but as my research progressed I began to see that a more psycho-educational approach would be more efficient. Both through my formal research and through informal discussions with actual Third Age people, I became aware that although the transitions (and associated stress) associated with this life stage are truly commonplace, most of the people experiencing them are unaware of that fact. They know they are struggling with their career, dealing with the implications of their children leaving home, and worrying about their health.
(and eventual death), but the don’t realize that everyone around them is struggling with the same issues. This can be seen in the way the popular culture treats the life stage: it is nameless, not really recognized as a standalone stage, and widely misunderstood: in pop culture, men have “midlife crises” which cause them to behave foolishly, women suffer from depression when the empty nest arrives, and the norm is for everyone to continue their career until they turn 65, at which point they retire to the golf course. Naturally, people measure their own experiences against these “norms,” and conclude there is something wrong with them. The lack of knowledge about the context (a lack that is shared by many practitioners) means that any help they seek may be misguided and rooted in incorrect assumptions.

In addition, my discovery that there are almost no support structures in place for Third Age issues – almost no groups dedicated to them, for instance – reinforced my shifting thinking: normalization of Third Age experiences would be the best starting place, and an educational (workshop) model seemed best suited. I see this workshop as an introduction: the hope is that for many participants, the information presented here will be enough for them to make sense of what they’re experiencing, and help them continue their journey. Others will need more, and the workshop can function as a gateway to further, deeper help.

As for the content of the workshop, I am struck by several important conclusions: first, I am convinced that the Third Age is a distinct life stage, with a set of common challenges that is unique to the age group. As stated earlier, I have personally experienced many of those challenges, and have witnessed others going experiencing them, too. I am also convinced that this is a new phenomenon. Lengthening life spans, and better health toward the latter parts of life, created opportunity for some individuals to pursue generativity, existential questions, and second careers; recent economic turmoil has created the necessity for many to grapple with those
issues. Finally, I am struck by the sheer volume of misinformation that exists about the people in this life stage: midlife crisis is rarely an actual crisis, Empty Nest Syndrome is actually rare and the empty often results in increased relationship satisfaction; and this is a dull time of life in which lacks the dynamism of young adulthood or the challenges of old age. Many therapeutic resources are available for youth, for young adults, and for seniors; very little explicit support exists to help Third Age individuals work through common issues. My hope is that the workshop that results from this project will be an early spark toward building a comprehensive support structure.
References


Appendix

THE THIRD AGE

NO LONGER YOUNG
NOT YET OLD
NOT YET DONE
WELCOME

“You don’t stop laughing when you grow old, you grow old when you stop laughing.”

-George Bernard Shaw
WHO ARE WE?

“We turn not older with years, but newer every day.”

-Emily Dickinson
• Age: 45-64
• 26.4% of U.S. population
• Gender: Any
• Ethnicity: Any
• Socioeconomic Status: Any
DEMOGRAPHICS

- Nationally: 81.5 million individuals
- Grew 31.5% from 2000-2010
- California: 9.3 million individuals
- 24.9% of population

Figure 5. Median Age by State: 2010
(For information on confidentiality protection, non-sampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/codes1.pdf)

Median age
- 40.0 or more
- 37.5 to 39.9
- 35.0 to 37.4
- Less than 35.0

U.S. median: 37.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Summary File 1.
EXPECTATION OF LIFE, BY AGE AND SEX: UNITED STATES, 2009

- A 45-year old today can expect to live another 35.8 years

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EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER

- Median age of worker in U.S.:
  - 2010: 41.7 years old
  - 2020: 42.8 years old (projected.)

- Percent of workforce over age 55:
  - 2000: 13.1%
  - 2010: 19.5%
  - 2020: 25.2% (projected)

![Chart 1. Labor force participation rates, 1960–2010 and projected 2020](chart_image)

MONEY AND AGE

- Job insecurity
- Stagnant wages
- Rising costs (especially healthcare)
- Later retirement (if at all)
FAMILY

- At age 45-54:
  - 61.6% are married
  - 19.1% are divorced
  - 12.4% never married
  - 3.9% are separated
  - 3% are widowed

- At age 55-64:
  - 60.5% are married
  - 20.1% are divorced
  - 8.6% never married
  - 2.7% are separated
  - 8.1% are widowed
SHARED CHALLENGES
GENERATIVITY

“Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength.”

-Betty Friedan
ERIK ERIKSON’S EIGHT AGES OF MAN

- Trust vs. Mistrust
- Autonomy vs. Shame
- Initiative vs. Guilt
- Industry vs. Inferiority
- Identity vs. Role Confusion
- Intimacy vs. Isolation
- Generativity vs. Stagnation
- Ego Integrity vs. Despair
GENERATIVITY VS. STAGNATION

- Erikson’s Seventh Age of Man
- Called the “Care” stage
- Concerned with one’s legacy
• Old concern: building a life

• New concern: “establishing and guiding the next generation”
• Tied to existential concerns
  • What is the meaning of my life?
  • OR, how do I make meaning for my life?
OH MY GOD, I’M GOING TO DIE

- Someday

Image courtesy of Danilo Rizzuti / FreeDigitalPhotos.net
EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH

- Making sense of death (and life) is one of the fundamental tasks of the Third Age
- My life’s meaning is what I make of it
- I have the responsibility for my own life
- One tool we use to accomplish this task is to be generative: leave a legacy
• Where does the legacy reside?
• Children?
• Community?
• Society?
GENERATIVITY

- What does generativity look like in your life?
  - Outward-oriented: volunteerism or other altruistic activity
  - Self-oriented: transcendence of personal boundaries
    - Introspection
    - New commitment to education
    - Revived or new spirituality

Image courtesy of khunaspix/FreeDigitalPhotos.net
ORAL HISTORY

- Take Stock of Your Life
- Your biggest accomplishment?
- Your contributions to your community?
- Your advice for the next generation?
SHARED CHALLENGES
CAREER

“How old would you be if you didn’t know how old you are?”

-Satchel Paige
CAREERS IN THE THIRD AGE

- If I am what I do, what happens when what I do changes? Or when I no longer “do” anything?
• I’m not ready to retire
• My job is no longer secure
• I want to do something meaningful
• What would be my goal if I choose (or am forced) to leave my current job?
• Building a better community?
• Leaving a legacy?
• Filling my soul?
CAREER COUNSELING TOOLS

- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
- Super Career Theory
- Narrative Theory
THE STORY OF YOUR CAREER

- If you had no time, money or training limitations, what would you do?
- What prevents you from doing it?
- What evidence do you have that you can’t do it or it won’t work

It’s story TiME
CAREER NARRATIVE EXERCISE

• If your life were a movie, what would the title be?
• Who would star as you?
• What would the central conflict of the movie be?
• How would it end? What would the outcome be?
• What are some possible alternative outcomes?
SHARED CHALLENGES

EMPTY NEST

“Though age from folly could not give me freedom, it does from childishness.”

-William Shakespeare
WHAT IS EMPTY NEST SYNDROME?

- Refers to when last child leaves household
- Not a recognized diagnosis
- “Syndrome” is not the norm
- Empty Nest is a normal transition
- Depending on your culture, empty nest may not apply at all
- Parents must adjust to new role
- Not necessarily (or even usually) a negative experience
• Changes relationship between parents and now-adult children
• Changes roles parents play in household
• Changes parents relationship with each other
• How have my relationships changed?
• How do I think and feel about it?
• Is my thinking rational? Demanding? Perfectionist?
• How often does I use the word “should”??
WRAP UP

- More information
- Resources
- Questions?
THANK YOU!

“The man who views the world at 50 the same way he did at 20 has wasted 30 years of his life.”

-Muhammad Ali